

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Improving Teacher Quality 2007 Grant Competition

What do the acronyms used by this program mean?

The following are the acronyms most frequently used in the Improving Teacher Quality grant competition:

- CPEC – California Postsecondary Education Commission (state agency that administers the ITQ Program)
- ED – U.S. Department of Education (federal funding agency)
- IHE – Institution of Higher Education (public and private colleges and universities)
- ITQ – Improving Teacher Quality (Title II-A federally funded state grants program)
- NCLB – the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (federal law that funds elementary and secondary education programs)
- LEA – Local Educational Agency (school districts and county offices of education; for ITQ grants, only districts may be a “required” partner)
- RFP – Request for Proposals (notification and requirements to compete for an ITQ grant)

PARTNERSHIP QUESTIONS

What is meant by “required partnerships” to receive a grant?

In order to be funded, a project must be provided by a partnership that includes, at a minimum, a school or division that prepares teachers and principals in an Institution of Higher Education (IHE); a department within a school of arts and sciences in an IHE (representing the content area that is the focus of the project); and a high-need Local Educational Agency (LEA). Other (“optional”) partners may be involved, including another LEA, a public charter school, an elementary or secondary school, an educational service agency, a nonprofit educational organization, another IHE, a school of arts and sciences within that IHE, the division of that IHE that prepares teachers and principals, a nonprofit cultural organization, an entity carrying out a pre-kindergarten program, a teacher organization, a principal organization, or a business.

What do “required partner,” “principal partner,” and “lead partner” mean?

“Required partner” is one of three entities that federal statute requires be a participant in a partnership under the Improving Teacher Quality Program. The required partners are a school or division in an IHE that prepares teachers and principals, a school of arts and sciences in an IHE, and a high-need LEA. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) refers to the statutorily required partner as a “principal partner.” The “lead partner,” though not an official term, refers to the partner that assumes responsibility for operating the project, and may or may not be a “required” partner.

Do both IHE partners have to be from the same institution?

No. It is permissible for a partner IHE school or division that prepares teachers and principals and a partner IHE school of arts and sciences to be from separate IHEs. Additional IHEs may be optional partners.

What is meant by the “high-need LEA” requirement?

The required Local Educational Agency (LEA) partner **MUST** be a high-need LEA. This definition has two elements:

- The LEA serves at least 10,000 children from families below the poverty level OR at least 20% of the children in the district are from families below the poverty level (based on district population—the number of children age 5-17 living within the district boundaries—NOT on school enrollment), AND
- There is a high percentage of teachers who are not teaching in the academic subjects or grade levels that the teachers were trained to teach, OR there is a high percentage of teachers with emergency, provisional, or temporary certification or licensing.
- **IMPORTANT:** At least ONE school to be served by the grant must also fit the requirement for “high-need.” However, as U.S. Census figures are not available by school site, the applicant may use other indicators, such as percent of free and reduced lunch AND a high percentage of teachers teaching outside of their certification or with provisional, emergency, or temporary credentials.

How is poverty determined? How flexible is this determination?

With regard to the required partner LEA, *only* U.S. Census data may be used for the poverty determination, the first of two tests of “high-need” for the district. The requirement specifies that EITHER 10,000 students OR 20% of the students age 5-17 living in the district must come from families living in poverty. This is not a flexible requirement regarding the LEA. An up-to-date Excel table that lists California LEAs meeting this requirement is posted at <http://www.cpec.ca.gov/FederalPrograms/EligibleDistricts2007.xls> and should be consulted when determining the LEA to be included in your partnership.

While only U.S. Census data may be used to determine LEA eligibility, indicators such as eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch or low school performance may be used to support the *need* for a project, and may also be used to designate the high-need school or schools which must be served by the project.

What is meant by a “high percentage” of teachers who are teaching outside their field or whose credentials are not permanent?

Since NCLB requires all teachers to be “highly qualified” by 2005-06, the percentage of these teachers has declined, but has not reached zero. Applicants will be required to report the percentage of teachers they have in both categories. Based on the 2005-2006 report of the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing on teacher supply, which shows that 94.9% of teachers statewide are fully credentialed, 5% or more teachers in the categories above can be deemed to be a “high percentage.” LEAs with a lower percentage will not be disqualified if the proposal shows a reason for the lower number and explains how the highest need teachers will be given priority.

Can a community college be a required partner? Can it be a project lead?

Generally, community colleges cannot meet the federal requirement as “mandatory” or “required” partners unless they provide teacher preparation that leads to a credential—a condition that few California community colleges meet. They also do not qualify as arts and science partners because they do not award baccalaureate degrees. *However, community colleges may be additional partners in any project, may be designated as project lead by the partnership, and may receive the project award. Their participation is encouraged.*

Can a county office of education be a required partner? Can it be a project lead?

According to the U.S. Department of Education, because a county office of education is not the same kind of funding recipient as a school district and because its “high-need” status cannot be determined through U.S. Census data, it cannot be considered a required partner. *However, a county office of education may be an additional partner in a project, and may be designated as project lead by the partnership. As with community colleges, the participation of county offices of education is encouraged.*

May an Extension Division of an IHE coordinate or lead a grant?

An Extension Division or other IHE organizational unit may be an additional partner in a grant and may assume responsibility for grant management. However, the mandatory partners of a School of Education and a School of Arts and Sciences must also be included in the grant.

May an IHE outside of California participate in a grant?

There is no prohibition against a non-California IHE participating as a partner in a grant, even as a required partner (either education or arts and science). However, the grant will be awarded only to a California-based IHE, which must also be part of the partnership.

Are private schools eligible to participate in partnerships?

Yes, both private Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) and teachers or principals in private K-12 schools may participate. Whether or not a private IHE participates, there must be two required IHE partners—a school or division that prepares teachers and principals, and a school of arts and sciences. Private K-12 school teachers and principals may also participate to the extent that the partner LEA uses funds to provide for professional development for teachers and others. (Additional information on private school participation is available in the Title II-A Non-Regulatory Guidance, Section H, at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf>.)

Which partner receives the funding?

Only California institutions of higher education (IHEs) may be designated as grantees. This includes colleges and universities in the University of California (UC) system, California State University (CSU) system, and accredited private universities within the state. California Community Colleges may also be designated by required partners to receive a grant although they are only optional partners. Any partner in the grant may act as the fiscal agent, although normally that is the role of the IHE receiving the grant. Also, any partner in the grant may act as the lead partner responsible for project management. Funds awarded to IHEs may be provided to other members of the partnership as subgrants or through contracts or interagency agreements. No single partner in the grant may BENEFIT from more than 50% of the funds in the grant (see additional information under Funding Questions).

May an ITQ grant serve only a single K-12 school?

Yes, a grant may serve only a single school. However, the Local Educational Agency (LEA) in which this single school is located becomes a required partner in the grant and must qualify as high-need based on the previously described poverty and teacher qualification requirements.

Are there specific rules for the structure of a partnership?

There is no cookie-cutter design by which partnerships must be structured, except an eligible partnership must include the three federally mandated partners. The partnership needs to have a coherent plan that prioritizes service to teachers serving high-need students, but it may organize itself and designate its leadership to best meet project requirements.

SCHEDULE QUESTIONS

What are the deadlines for this grant?

There are two deadlines of importance to applicants:

- **Friday, May 25, 2007 at 4:00pm** – Letters of Intent to Submit a Proposal must be received by CPEC by either fax or regular mail. All applicants must submit copies with original signatures via US Mail by May 29, 2007. Failure to submit a Letter of Intent will disqualify any potential proposer. Forms and instructions are available at www.cpec.ca.gov/FederalPrograms/RFP.asp.
- **Tuesday, July 3, 2007 at 5:00pm** -- Printed copies of proposals must be received by the Commission via U.S. Postal Service or overnight delivery service. Application Instructions at the website above will have additional information. [NOTE: this is the correct time, and is one hour later than specified in the RFP; a change was made to allow proposals to be submitted until close of business on July 3rd.]

What is the expected start date for this grant?

The Commission hopes to award the grants in time to begin activities on Monday, October 1st. In the event of a delay in awarding grants, it is still anticipated the grant period will begin close to that date, and that subsequent project years will run from October 1 through September 30. [NOTE: Grant awards in 2007 are contingent on continued funding by Congress and subject to any changes that may be made in the reauthorization of NCLB.]

What happens between the submission of the grants and announcements of awards?

The proposals submitted will be distributed to peer reviewers who will read and score them. In early August, the reviewers will be convened in panels to identify all proposals that can be deemed to be fundable. ITQ staff and selected panel members will hold interviews, most likely in late August or early September, with finalist proposers, and provide a final list of recommended grantees to the ITQ program administrator, who will submit recommendations to the CPEC Executive Director for approval and grant award.

Is the Project Year Schedule flexible?

No, the Project Year Schedule is not flexible. For clarity, a distinction should be made between *programmatic scheduling* and *budget/fiscal/administrative scheduling*. Although a project must follow the Commission's project year schedule for budget and fiscal administration, proposers are free to structure and schedule program activities as they wish. CPEC closes out each year fiscally, but there is no need to interrupt project activities when transitioning from one year to the next.

In terms of their budget, projects must adhere to the project year schedule provided in the application documents. Each year's budget is considered a separate "pot" of money, which means:

- The budget must be structured to follow the given project year schedule (but activities may overlap project years),
- The project will submit mid-year and Annual Fiscal Reports on the schedule provided.
- Program activities that occur during a given project year must be paid for out of funds from the same year's *approved* budget.
- Commission approval is required to carry unspent funds over from year to year.

Proposers should schedule activities as they determine best for the project's needs. The costs for the activities, depending on the dates they are incurred, should be allocated to the appropriate year's budget. If necessary, unanticipated schedule changes or other administrative issues can be accommodated by carrying over unspent funds to a subsequent year, with Commission approval.

FUNDING AND BUDGET QUESTIONS

What is the source of the funds for these grants?

Improving Teacher Quality State Grants funds come from Title II, Part A of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001—the federal legislation that provides support to elementary and secondary education. The program’s goal, in line with NCLB’s overall goals, is to ensure that all students have access to highly qualified teachers. In addition to these competitive grants awarded to institutions of higher education, Title II-A allocates formula grants directly to school districts for professional development (for further information on formula grants, contact Robert Lee at the California Department of Education by e-mail at rllee@cde.ca.gov).

Are matching funds required?

There is no requirement to provide matching funds for ITQ grants. However, contributions of matching funds and/or in-kind services from the applicant institution, its partners, or outside sources ***are strongly encouraged*** as a commitment to demonstrating project sustainability. These contributions may also gain extra credit in the scoring. One potential source of contributions is the LEA’s Title II-A formula grant allocation.

Are there funding and duration limits for the proposed project?

The 2007 initiative—Early Elementary Education—Grades K-2—provides funding for three years for professional development activities and for a fourth year to conclude the evaluation research required in the project. Projects will be funded from \$200,000 up to a maximum of \$1,000,000 for the total four-year period.

No per-year limits apply to project budgets, but budgets for the first three years are expected to be larger than for the final year, in which only research, not professional development, will be funded.

Prospective proposers must demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of their proposed expenditures and present a plan in which the resources and scope of the project are appropriate to the number of teachers and students to be served and to the services to be provided.

What is the indirect cost recovery rate?

The maximum indirect cost recovery rate is 8 percent. In the event that funds are allocated by the grantee institution through contracts or subgrants to other partners, the indirect cost recovery rate may be applied only to the first \$25,000 of the contract or subgrant. Additionally, grantees are expected to apply the 8% maximum to indirect charges by other agencies in those contracts or subgrants.

What is the 50% rule regarding funding?

The Improving Teacher Quality State Grants Program requires that no single partner in the grant may BENEFIT from more than 50% of the funds in the grant (since each project requires at least three partners, this should not be difficult). Projects will be expected to estimate the distribution of funding benefit when submitting their proposed budgets and to file annual reports and a final report of how they have adhered to the rule. More discussion of the rule can be found in Section F-29 of the Non-Regulatory Guidance for Title II-A issued by the U.S. Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf>).

Are meal expenses an allowable cost?

Reasonable expenses for food are an allowable cost as a meeting expense under federal rules; they need not be itemized in the budget but should be included under the category of meeting expenses; projects should also follow their institution’s policy with regard to such expenses. Additionally, travel that includes meal expenses is an allowable cost, but projects should limit travel expenses to the State of California guidelines or their own institution’s policy, whichever is less (see <http://www.dpa.ca.gov/jobinfo/statetravel.shtml> for state rules and reimbursement rates). A general budget guideline would be to minimize meal costs to the extent possible, and to seek funds from other sources or in-kind contributions to support meals at meetings if possible.

Please explain the “teacher day” calculation in the Budget Overview sheet.

The purpose of the Budget Overview is to summarize major budget figures on one page to make them easily available to reviewers and ITQ staff. The purpose of the calculation of “teacher days” is to produce an “apples to apples” comparative cost figure for a project that may be considered in evaluating whether it is cost-effective. Since most projects deliver services in increments of hours, rather than days, we have provided a conversion from hours into days. The calculation is intended to convert the total number of hours provided to all teachers served during the life of the project into a total number of project days provided, and then to arrive at a per day cost by dividing that figure into the total four-year cost of the project (**federal dollars only**).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Are controlled experiments required for the research portion of the grant? What level of statistical power is required?

The research portion of the grant should include an experimental or quasi-experimental design with sufficient controls to establish that the results measured at the project’s completion can reasonably be inferred to be linked to the intervention. Most projects have been able to identify similar cohorts to that which receives the intervention in order to secure data for control purposes. There are no specific requirements regarding statistical power, but projects should aim for the best result they can obtain within the fiscal parameters of the project and practical issues on the ground. Overall, projects will be expected to gather and report evidence of impacts on teacher practice and knowledge and on student achievement that result from the intervention.

Who should projects utilize to manage the research portion of their grants? Is it required (or prohibited) to contract with research experts outside of the institution submitting the proposal?

Many projects secure the assistance of external research experts to help design and implement their research plan. This is not required, and is up to the discretion of the institution.

What percent of the total budget is assumed to be allowable for the research portion of the grant?

A figure between eight and 15 percent of the total grant is generally considered within a reasonable range. Any amount below or above that range will require additional justification based on project specifics.

How do we provide research references in the proposal?

In those sections of the project narrative that cite research studies, proposers should use APA style to provide the citations (parenthetical citations at the end of the material cited). The list of references may be included within the narrative, in which case it will be counted as part of the page maximum, or as a separate list of references (maximum: 3 pages) attached as an appendix that will not count against the total page limit for the narrative.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

May an institution apply for more than one project?

Yes, an institution may apply for more than one project. However, a separate Letter of Intent must be submitted for each project. [NOTE: with regard to project leadership, an individual may be designated project director on only one project at a time; multiple submissions of projects should include different project directors. No director of a currently-funded project should be submitted as director of a new project. The Commission will not concurrently fund more than one project with the same director.]

May an institution with a currently funded ITQ Project apply for a new ITQ grant?

Yes, an institution may apply to conduct more than one project. [NOTE: with regard to project leadership, an individual may be designated project director on only one project at a time. Multiple submissions should include different directors for each project. No director of a currently-funded project may serve as director of a new project. The Commission will not concurrently fund more than one project with the same director.]

Whose signatures are required on the Letter of Intent to Submit a Proposal?

The Letter of Intent to Submit a Proposal requires ONE signature from the Institution of Higher Education School or Division of Education (which prepares teachers and principals), ONE signature from the School of Arts and Science or a department within it, and ONE signature from the Local Educational Agency. Because the Letter of Intent is mainly used to establish the number of potential proposals and to demonstrate that a partnership is in place to submit one, it does NOT require the same level of signatures required on the final proposal. Project co-directors, lead faculty, or others involved in submitting the proposal may sign. The proposal itself requires signatures from administrators at the appropriate level to accept a grant.

Since application forms are required in addition to the RFP document, how do we get those forms?

Partnerships that submit a Letter of Intent to Submit a Proposal by the deadline of 4pm Friday, May 25, 2007, and whose letters meet the minimum requirements to qualify will be notified by e-mail within a few days and provided access to formal application documents and instructions. Application materials are in downloadable Word and Excel documents.

May any grades except K-2 be served in this initiative?

The 2007 Initiative is targeted specifically to early elementary—grades K-2—and projects should be designed to focus on teachers (and, if appropriate, principals) across whole schools or districts in that grade band **only**. A project may create linkages with preschool teachers and/or teachers in grades 3-6 and may even provide them with professional development services, **but the project should pay for the expenses of those educators out of other fund sources than the ITQ grant**. Middle and high school teachers may not be served by this grant. Also note: projects should serve the entire K-2 grade band, not a single grade.

Other than current K-2 teachers, who else may be served by these projects? What about principals, paraprofessionals, and preservice teachers?

The ITQ projects are intended primarily to support active teachers and their principals. Projects are especially encouraged to consider providing professional development for principals in schools with grades K-2 and to include them in whole school or district teams. Paraprofessionals may also be included if they are preparing to be teachers, based on federal guidelines in Section G-18 of the Title II-A Non-Regulatory Guidance (<http://www.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/guidance.pdf>). However, paraprofessionals not preparing to be teachers, and preservice teachers who are not paraprofessionals, are not eligible to be supported by grant funding. They may be involved in the project, but the costs of serving them must be paid for out of other funding sources.